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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

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By HR-M/SG, NARA, Date 4/12/91

DATE: November 17, 1958

SUBJECT: Berlin Situation

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PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Wilhelm G. Grewe, German Embassy
The Secretary
Ambassador David K.E. Bruce
Mr. Martin J. Hillenbrand - GER

NOV 25 1958

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Spencer 15-17

At the request and under instructions from his Government, Ambassador Grewe called on the Secretary today to discuss the Berlin situation.

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The Secretary noted that there were two aspects to the problem: the effort by the Soviet Union to turn over its responsibilities to the East Germans, and harassment by the Soviets of our transit movements, for example, as in the recent incident involving military truck traffic. The Secretary said that he assumed the Ambassador's queries related more to the first rather than to the second type of problem. However, our people in Europe, especially the military, took a serious view of the recent incident on the Autobahn.

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The Secretary said that we are having some discussions with the British and French as to the position to be taken relative to Soviet efforts to pass their responsibilities on to the GDR to compel recognition of the latter. He added that we would, of course, be very anxious to learn what the Federal Government thinks our position ought to be, since this is obviously a matter of great concern to it. Sometimes the United States has the impression that we are inclined to react more strongly to such situations than the British, French, or the Germans. Last May, the Secretary continued, when he was in Berlin and the question of tariffs and canal tolls was being discussed, he noted a certain complacency on the part of the Federal Republic and an unwillingness to take counter-measures of any kind. He did not necessarily question the decisions finally taken, but could not help but note the fact that there was this reluctance to take counter-measures which would disturb economic relations between the Federal Republic and the GDR. However, the Secretary had noted the Chancellor's statement of last week indicating that he might be considering the possibility of counter-measures in the present situation.

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The Secretary stated that, as far as having certain practical dealings with people purporting to be GDR officials were concerned, he personally did not feel too strongly one way or the other. One could treat them as agents of the Soviet Union or just deal with them. After all, we deal with the Chinese Communists when necessary in certain practical situations. We do not recognize them politically, but do recognize them as a force to be dealt with, as for example, at the time of the Korean Armistice negotiations, the negotiations over Indo-China in Geneva, and in our efforts to get civilian prisoners released. The Secretary referred to the kidnapper analogy used at the time of the helicopter case. He said that when someone kidnapped your child, you deal with the kidnappers to get the child released. Such dealings need not have any political implications. The Secretary added that his remarks should not be interpreted as representing any definitive view, since we had not yet had any complete exchange with the British and French on the subject. If the Federal Republic has strong views on the matter they would of course have to be taken into consideration.

Ambassador Grewe said he had noted the New York Times report of yesterday indicating that, under certain limited circumstances, the United States might be prepared to deal with GDR officials holding them as agents for the Soviets.

The Secretary said we have a theory, as in the Red Chinese case, that you can have dealings with these people without implying recognition. The situation was obviously one where the considered views of the Federal Republic should be carefully weighed in the scales.

The Secretary went on to say that we must think through the entire problem to see if we are prepared to accept the consequences. We apparently are prepared to accept more serious consequences than the British or French. The Secretary, himself, believed in the principle that where the Soviets probed to find weaknesses, there we should show strength. This policy had been fairly successful, for example, in the Far and Middle East. He had always assumed that Berlin was a logical place for a probe by the Soviets. The problem is what can be done in specific cases. The United States is

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not alone
here. The British, French, and also the Federal Republic are involved, and we will not come to any final decisions without ascertaining the views of the Federal Republic as to contemplated courses of action. The Secretary added that he, himself, doubted the practicability of total non-recognition of the existence of something which is a fact. He felt that, if something is a fact, we have to recognize this fact even if we don't like it. In time of war we recognize the existence of the enemy as a fact. To pretend the enemy does not exist is not a very realistic or practical policy. However, the United States will be found to be prepared to be as tough as anyone else in this situation, but not alone.

The Secretary continued that we are also concerned with interference to our trucks and whether to make a major issue of it or not. We will need to take account of French, British, and Federal Republic views in this matter. We should perhaps give more weight than in the past to the views of the Federal Republic, and the Federal Republic should perhaps assume more responsibility in these matters.

The Secretary said we had no clear view as to whether the subject should be discussed in NATO. It would be in line with our policy of encouraging political consultation to do so. If Quemoy and Matsu were proper subjects for discussion in NATO, then the Berlin situation certainly seemed to be also. One could not say that NATO is not interested in this problem. There must probably be some discussion in NATO, but the final responsibility for decisions must rest with the Three Powers that had juridical responsibility. This responsibility could be shared perhaps with the Federal Republic.

Before leaving, Ambassador Grewe indicated he had one further short question to ask. He said his Government had, of course, followed with close attention the recent statement of Defense Secretary McElroy and the subsequent statement issued by the State Department. He noted there might be some fear that American forces would be weakened in the Federal Republic under the McElroy scheme. The Secretary said he did not think there would be any substantial repercussions. We are, of course, constantly re-examining our forces here and in Asia to meet changed requirements, but no change in policy so far as the Europe was concerned was intended.

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